

Preparing for and Responding to a Death by Suicide

Checklist 7a

This checklist provides administrators and educators with an efficient inventory of what empirical research and best practice suggests as important considerations when evaluating the status of a school's ability to prepare and respond to a death by suicide. This checklist can be used to quickly evaluate what services and policies your school already has in place (indicated by a "checked box") to respond to a death by suicide or what services and policies your school may be lacking that may need to be implemented or revised (indicated by a "blank box"). This checklist corresponds to Issue Brief 7a, which provides a more in depth and detailed discussion concerning how to prepare for and respond to a death by suicide. The intent of the Issue Brief is to provide research-based and best-practice suggestions for how a school may wish to prepare and respond to a death by suicide. The intention is not to provide definitive declarations for what schools should do when responding to a death by suicide because each school will vary in their ability to implement and maintain suggestions mentioned in the Issue Brief.

What to DO following a suicide:

Do

- Utilize and follow the school's guidelines for dealing with a suicidal crisis. If the school does not have guidelines please refer to "Steps for Responding to a Suicidal Crisis" found on Page 2 in this Issue Brief 7a.
- Respond to the suicide within 24 hours of the suicide.
- Act in a concerned and empathetic manner.

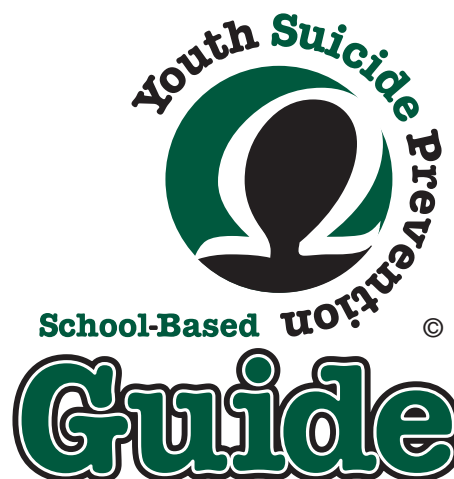
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This publication is also available on-line as an Adobe Acrobat PDF file: <http://theguide.fmhi.usf.edu>

7a

Checklist



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Checklist 7a continued

Do

- Inform all staff members about the suicide and provide a debriefing session where staff may voice their concerns, apprehensions, and any questions they may have.
- Inform school board members.
- Make sure all teachers announce the death of the student to their first class of the day. It is preferable to describe the deceased as “having died by suicide,” rather than as “a suicide,” or having “committed suicide.” The latter two expressions reduce the person to the mode of death, or connote criminal or sinful behavior.
- Provide counseling sites throughout the school for students.
- Avoid any glorification of the suicide such as holding a memorial for the student or in some way honoring that student.
- Assign a school liaison to handle all media inquiries in order to avoid sensationalistic stories concerning the suicide.
- Continually monitor the school’s emotional climate (Has there been an increase in fights or school delinquency following a death by suicide?).
- Evaluate all activities done following a death by suicide (How did your school respond? What worked and what did not work?).
- Utilize an established linkage system or community network in order to make referrals to the appropriate services as well to exchange information concerning the appropriate steps for treating those affected by the suicide.
- Utilize an established school response crisis team, which should include a diverse group of school professionals, such as the principal, counselor, teacher and possibly the school nurse.
- Follow the steps outlined later in this section.

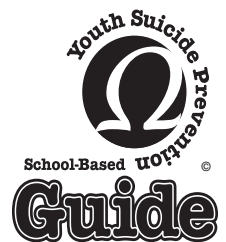
What NOT to do following a suicide crisis:

Do Not

- Behave in a quiet and overly conservative manner.
- Plant a tree or object in order to honor the student.
- Hold a memorial service for the student at the school.
- Describe in great detail the suicide (method or place).
- Dramatize the impact of suicide through descriptions and pictures of grieving relatives, teachers or classmates.
- Glamorize or sensationalize the suicide.

Additional information corresponding to the items in this checklist can be found in **Issue Brief 7a: Preparing for and Responding to a Death by Suicide: Steps for Responding** at <http://theguide.fmhi.usf.edu>

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